



CRISIS OF MASK IN PRESENT CORONA CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY ON CHARIDA VILLAGE OF PURULIA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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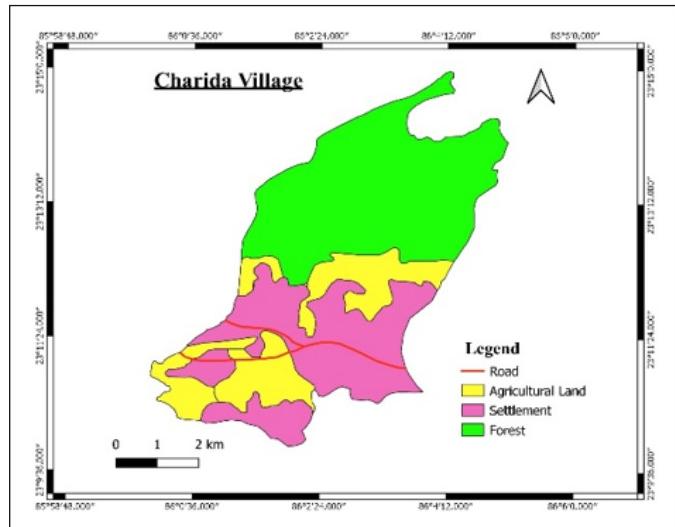
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ABSTRACT

The people of India as well as West Bengal is going through a crisis period due to COVID-19. And in order to reduce the infection India government has taken a step of 'Lockdown' which means a state of restriction access instituted as a security measure. Due to this situation all over the state, the rhythm of daily life journey has fallen. Rural and urban economy of a country is totally disrupted. The main objective of this study is to find out the lockdown effects on economy of the mask makers. Charida (Chorda) a rural craft hub has been selected as a study area. In this village almost total households are engaged with mask making and Chhau dancing. Craftsmen had taken loan of high amount with 50% interest rate for this rural mask making business and also invested money for performance of Chhau dance in outside of the village or district. But this 'Corona' demon pandemic totally hits their economic development curve. Cancellation of every outside show and fair, dancer as well as craftsmen have lost their income. Those who are engaged to collect products from forest and sells products at local or district market, lockdown also hammer on their economy. Still now extension of lockdown is totally disrupting their source of income. In between mental pressure they are fighting with this tough situation and trying to recover their loss with alternate option. Such as designer mask as protective face gear and perform Chhau dance with maintain social distancing between the performers.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Lockdown, Mask maker, Chau dance, Craftsman.

In keeping with the current situation this paper is being written. The main objective of this study is to discuss the lockdown effects on economy of Chhau mask makers. Charida also known as 'Chorda' according to census is a village specialized for mask making and Chhau dancing under the Bagmundi CD block in Jhalda subdivision of Purulia district, West Bengal, India. Geographical location of this village is 23.2046° N and 86.0314° E. village in the land of red soil is situated at the foothill of Ajodhya hill.



INTRODUCTION::

Generally, 'lockdown' is a situation in which people are not allowed to enter and leave a place freely because of an emergency. On 24th march 2020, the government of India under Prime Minister order of lockdown for first 21 days, limiting movement of the entire a huge mass of population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic situation in India. This lockdown is subsequently extended several times and this restriction paralyzes the general rhythm of life of people.

This COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis. But the pandemic is much more than health crisis, it's also a unprecedent socio-economic crisis. Stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social and economic effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars. Every day people are losing jobs and income with no way of knowing when normality will come back.

Flu Pandemic was the outbreak of an unusually deadly influenza pandemic in India between 1918-1920 as a part of the wise Spanish flu pandemic. It hits different parts of the country in three waves with the second wave being the high mortality rate.

Today in present situation lockdown a stringent restriction stopped most economic activities and caused millions of people, many of them daily wage earners to lose their jobs and revenue stream. Various problems faced by people.

The study area Charida is a village of mask makers of the celebrated dance form of the region Chhau dance. The tradition of *Chhau mask* making started in Charida about 150 years back during the rule of king Madan Mahan Singh Deo of Baghmundi. In modern days, mask for Chhau dance still constitute the main market; the mask makers also make smaller masks for home decor and souvenirs. Chhau dance is originated as an acrobatic martial art-based dance and involves vigorous movement. In Purulia Chau, the dancers wear large stylized masks. The dance stories are based on mythological tales that propagate moral and ethical values. This dance was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative 'List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' in 2010.



METHOD OF THE STUDY:

This study is based on an intensive field work which has done on February, 2019. And the present scenario has been described with the help of many articles and conversation with craftsman of the study village over telephone. Another secondary population data has been collected from the primary census abstract of Purulia district 2011.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

On the basis of the result of this study, it can be said loudly that this changing image of this rural hub is not as expected. In one word, lockdown caused the rhythm of villager's lives has fallen. Every year during the month of 'Chaitra'(March-April), this villagers in Purulia, Bankura come alive with the sound and rhythm of various traditional instruments as Chhau dance troupes enacts episode from epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, local folklores themes. The mask of Hindu gods, goddesses, mythological demon characters

played in the dance dramas are an indispensable ensemble of the performing art. The maximum families in the Charida village almost have the monopoly in making these gorgeous masks.

The Chhau dance, making of instruments for musical accompaniment and making mask all are mainly undertaken by SC and ST communities in this village.

According to the 2011 Census of India, Charida has a total population of 2,568, of which 1,353 (53%) are males and 1,215 (47%) are female. Children with age 0-6 is 385 which makes up 14.99% of total population of village. There has lower literacy rate compared to West Bengal. In 2011, literacy rate of Charida village was 64.86 % compared to 76.26 % of West Bengal.

Lock down effects on economy of villagers:

In this village people are engaged in different types of source of income. Main traditional source of income is making Chhau masks and sell those as either for decoration or for Chhau dance. Previously only members from lower castes used to do it, but caste-based divisions are fading by the day. Many youngsters from general caste families are today taking up mask making. Crop cultivation is also a second option of source of income. Few tribal families are engaged with forest product collection and selling. But very small percentage of people engage in salaried job sector directly.

- 1. Mask makers and Chhau Dancers:** Almost all the Chau dance groups of West Bengal and Jharkhand collect their mask from Charida's craftsman. The dance dramas are mostly created in rural settings, coinciding with the Gajan festivals that span a week, starting in the last week of the Bengali month of Chaitra.

About almost 250 families primarily are involved with the craft while another 300 families work under the craftsman as decorators. Many craftsmen also employ helpers in their workshops. In this year due to COVID-19 all booking of dance performances have been cancelled, said Ranjit Mahato of Biswakarma Chhau Nritya Dol. The one performance, the top groups, generally comprising 25 to 30 members, charge between Rs. 10000 and 15000. He said that March-April month are the peak performing season for them. They get to perform every day one or the other village during this time. The cancellation of shows has rendered the mask-makers job less. Few craftsman families had produced raw material worth high price, hoping to generate business and for this they had taken loan from a local women self-help group at an interest of a certain percentage. But due to pandemic with lockdown totally has made them indigent. Similar worries are gnawing at the heart of many other families in the village involved in mask making.



The price of mask varies according to quality, size and demands. Generally, good quality masks range from rs. 1000 to 5000. In the village this price for small pieces of mask is rs.20 but in the Purulia town market that same mask is Rs. 150. For decking a mask priced Rs. 1000 a decorator gets Rs. 120. Similarly for decorating a mask worth Rs. 5000, he gets Rs. 450-500. Though women are also now getting involved in the mask-making. Not all masks are used solely for the Chhau dance. Many find pride of place as prized souvenirs on walls of home. For this rate begin from Rs. 700 and can go up to Rs. 4000. Most popular Chhau mask picked up by the tourists. This year neither performers, craftsmen nor decorators have made any monetary profit.

- 2. Agricultural labour:** This village is situated at the foothills of Ajodhya hill. Granite and Gneiss are the predominant rocks of north western part of the Bagmundi and south margin of the district Phyllites Mica-schists and Epidiorites flanked by Dharwa metamorphic quartzites and granitic gneiss act as a water divide between Karru and the Subarnarekha. Karru, Sobha, Subarnarekha are most popular rainfed river passing far from this village. So insufficient irrigation, lack of rainfall, undulating relief, semi fertile soil are the main causes of low productive agriculture. Due to this lockdown the cul-

tivators and share croppers loss their income while some face the worth of unemployment. In many cases daily wages for harvesting crops rise as high as 50%, making it unremunerative for producers since prices have collapsed due to lack of market access including the stoppage of transportation and closure of border.

- 3. Forest dwellers:** Forests dwellers and indigenous communities usually collect minor forest produce or non-timber forest products from the forest of Ajodhya hill and sell them to make a living. Sal seed, Sal leaf, Mahua flower etc., these items are seasonal and the selling period of products is from March to June. Therefore, the lockdown at this time has put at risk the livelihood of millions of forest dependent communities. There indigenous people facing difficulties in selling forest produce as the markets are shut resulting in loss of livelihood.

CONCLUSION:

According to telegraph newspaper to offset the drop in demand for traditional mask after fairs were cancelled because of the lockdown the artisans have turned to making protective masks using paper and cloth that have the imprint of Chhau design on them. A craftsman who has taken over the art from his forefather in the first to designing the protective mask that would help people cover the face and nose and yet be colorful and stylish. Doctors and health officials said they would examine the ability of these mask as protective face gear. The government official said that they can help them to sell those designer masks through Biswa Bangla Market. On the other side some Chhau dancer change their traditional story and choreographed an eight-minute dance drama titled 'Coronasur' (Demon Corona) wherein COVID-19 is personified as a demon that has besieged India with only two performers to drive home the point of social distancing.

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